

MAO'S WAR OF RESISTANCE: FRAMEWORK FOR CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

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What framework best explains China's grand strategy? Some postulate a transition of power theory: that China is a rising power to challenge the status quo power, the United States, and globally competes with or attempts to replace the latter. Others believe that China desires to be a regional hegemon and return Asia to a China-centered sphere. Many also believe that China drives to overcome the social construct of "century of humiliation" from its past history. This paper presents a view, however, that China's grand strategy can be best understood through Mao's theory of war of resistance. War of resistance, different from the theory of the war of revolution that Mao is most known for, is a defensive strategy he utilized in fighting the Japanese invasion of China. The theory advocates a war strategy that a weaker state can implement in resisting a stronger, imperialist state. This strategy appeals to Chinese elites who are still strongly influenced by Mao's thinking. The strategy aims to resist a hegemonic United States that encroaches on Chinese sovereignty. It uses conventional and unconventional elements of national power in a compound manner with both defensive and offensive approaches, oriented geographically and in a protracted manner.

MAO'S WAR OF RESISTANCE: FRAMEWORK FOR CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

Grand strategy is the direction projected in peacetime and wartime at the national-level utilizing all resources of the security community to achieve the nation's objectives.¹ More often than not, the real grand strategy, even for the United States, is not written. It can, however, be inferred from observing policies and through historical analysis.² Many believe that international relations theories are the best in explaining China's behaviors regarding conflicts and peace, and accordingly, they use realism, liberalism, or constructivism to derive China's unstated grand strategy. For example, some realists say a transition of power theory that China, as a rising power, challenges the status quo power, the United States, and globally competes with or attempts to replace the latter.³ The fact that China in 2010 replaced Japan as the world's second largest economy, and at the same time is becoming more vocal in the international community, e.g. issuing warnings against currency wars, taking belligerent stances on territorial disputes, or allowing military "hawks" to speak out against the United States, seem to confirm such grand strategy.⁴ Other realists believe that China desires to be a regional hegemon and return Asia to a China-centered sphere. China's aggressive diplomatic and security cooperation efforts with states along its periphery seem to bear this out.⁵ Based on liberalism, on the other hand, many postulate that a globalized China that must rely on trade for economic growth requires a stable and secure world environment. Hence, international cooperation is a compelling grand strategy so that China can mutually benefit with other states through a division of labor in economic activities according to states' comparative advantages.⁶ The concept of a strategic partnership between the United States and China or the idea of a "peaceful rise" falls

along this line of thinking.⁷ Constructivists meanwhile believe that China drives to overcome the social construct of a “century of humiliation” from its past history.⁸ The memories of undignified treatment that China received from imperial foreigners is engrained in the culture that wants to regain respect in the world. However, these international theorists’ perspectives alone do not accurately describe China’s grand strategy.

China has a unique grand strategy based on its political culture of Mao. China states its current strategy as that of “active defense” in its 2008 Defense White Paper.⁹ Active defense is a term Mao himself advocated, and it is also one of three broad diplomatic strategies postulated by Chas Freeman, a noted diplomat, writer, and Chinese expert, who more than likely conceived the three strategies from Mao’s ideas of revolution, passive defense, and active defense.¹⁰ While active defense is an accurate description, an even more accurate framework for describing China’s grand strategy is Mao’s theory of war of resistance. The war of resistance theory, different from the war of revolution theory that Mao is most known for, is derived from the conflict in which Chinese Nationalist and Communists collaborated to fight the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. The theory of war of resistance is Mao’s concepts for fighting a war so that a weaker China could defeat an invasion by a stronger, imperialist Japan. In the current resistance war strategy, the grand strategic aims of China are to economically grow and to resist a hegemonic United States that encroaches on its sovereignty. The strategy utilizes both conventional and unconventional elements of national power defensively, offensively and simultaneously using a geography-oriented approach in a protracted manner.

China's Strategic problem

What is China's strategic problem that the grand strategy should answer? Most experts agree that China's primary aims are economic growth and maintenance of domestic political cohesiveness in order to maintain the country's internal stability and the Chinese Communist Party's control.¹¹ A RAND study succinctly summarizes China's objectives as modernity, stability, and sovereignty.¹² Accordingly China's diplomatic and military strategy and actions domestically and in relations with the outside world, must provide the ways and means to achieve these ends.

Suitable ways and means to achieve the ends are derived first from conceptualizing an understanding of the world environment and making assumptions about the future environment. China's key assumption is that the United States will remain a global hegemonic power for the next several decades.¹³ At great detriment to its economic power, the United States will continue to play a leadership role, particularly in paying for security and stability of the world because the international system remains anarchic.¹⁴ As the security guarantor of economic markets, the United States maintains a forceful diplomacy and a powerful military to ensure the maintenance of global stability that ensures market predictability. Another Chinese assumption is that China will maintain a robust economic growth that will naturally cause the United States to fear its rise and attempt to remain as the top power, which necessitates denouncing China for not meeting western standards in politics, economic activities, and human rights. Yet at the same time, the United States will demand that China share the burden of costs in maintaining the stability and security around the globe.

What are China's opportunities and challenges in this environment? China greatly benefits from the international free-market system that allows it to compete with a large pool of cheap labor. In a very short time China was able to leverage this advantage to become the most competitive player to the United States.¹⁵ The United States bears extraordinary costs, economically and politically, to maintain the stability of that system while China is free-riding on the benefits. On the other hand, China does not quite enjoy the first-mover advantage that the United States enjoys in the global domains such as international politics, global markets, space, and cyberspace. The World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, G-8 and now G-20, the dollar standard, the Internet, and the Global Positioning System are all creations of the United States. The rules that the United States emplaced to protect the international system, as well as the physical protection of commerce lines of communication, allows it to influence the world's markets to its advantage. The United States is able to dictate to others, and, in China's views, at times meddle in the domestic affairs of China, including in the areas of human rights, political freedom, free market reforms, Taiwan, and Tibet. The United States has had the privilege of using public diplomacy, sanctions, Most Favored Nation status, World Trade Organization membership, and military sales to Taiwan as part of its imperial reach that breaches China's sovereignty.¹⁶

Thus, the United States is China's grand strategic problem. Without minimizing China's opportunities, challenges, and assumptions in its interactions with other states, the United States, as both a benefactor to China's economic growth and as an obstacle to China's greatness, occupies a special place in China's view of the world. Many

experts agree that China sees the United as “the principle threat,” and the essence of China’s grand strategy comes down to how it measures against and deals with the United States.¹⁷ David Lai notes that the United States was the only foreign nation called out by name in the 2008 Defense White Paper.¹⁸ According to Zi Zongyun:

In the relationship between China and the United States, apart from difficulties that are normal between any countries from a clash of interests, there are additional problems in the ideological aspect of Sino-U.S. relations, bearing an emotional character that is rare with relationship between other foreign countries.¹⁹

Even in relations to China’s peripheral countries:

Managing its relationship with the United States, the only superpower in the post-Cold War world, is the most significant challenge for China as it seeks to establish a positive security environment in its periphery.²⁰

What are the means and ways that China will use to achieve their aims given the international system led by the United States that offers both opportunities and challenges? Ideally the Chinese would like to take advantage of the system without adding undue costs, but China knows that cannot be costless forever. The United States’ competitive behavior and impositions on sovereign issues will have to be defended against. Mao’s war of resistance is the concept that provides the strategy.

War of Resistance

Mao’s war of resistance theory is not as well known as Mao’s thoughts on war of revolution. Logically the two types of conflicts are different, though many aspects are alike. While a revolutionary war is a conflict to overthrow an existing government, e.g. the Red Army versus the Chinese Republican government initially then against the Nationalists that followed into power afterwards, a war of resistance is a conflict against an invading external enemy, e.g. the Red Army cooperating with the Nationalist army to

fight the Japanese Imperial Army. Both wars are “people’s war” concepts, but fighting an external enemy takes different approaches than fighting one’s own kind.

The finer points of war of resistance are not readily understood because Mao himself caused confusion in differentiating between them because he wanted to emphasize the “people’s” nature of both. Mao initially used the term “revolutionary war” in his writings about the conflict against Japan, but in later writings he refers to it as the “War of Resistance” and clarifies it as a different form of fighting.²¹ In a lecture he delivered at the Red Army College in 1936, titled “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War,” Mao Tse-tung refers to the formation of the Communist Party and the Red Army, and its fight against the Chinese Nationalist Army, as a revolutionary war: a war to “bring about the defeat of the reactionary governments of their own countries.”²² This differs from a lecture he delivered in 1938 that is titled “Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War against Japan.”²³ Here guerrilla war is not revolutionary warfare, which is fought against an internal enemy, but rather a supplementary warfare in a *war of resistance* against an external enemy, especially an invading imperial army.²⁴ In a resistance war, two forms of warfare occur simultaneously, a “regular warfare (that) is primary and guerilla warfare (that is) supplementary.” In other words, the Nationalist Army waged conventional warfare against the Japanese while the Red Army waged guerilla warfare.

According to Mao, war of resistance is fought best in three phases in a protracted manner. First is the period of the enemy’s strategic offensive and one’s own strategic defensive, in which one’s conventional army fights a defensive, positional battle while its guerrilla forces fight a harassing war in the enemy’s rear area. The second period is that

of a stalemate, in which conventional armies on both sides have stalled, and one must use guerrilla warfare as the primary warfare against the invasion force. The last period is a strategic offense in which one's conventional army fights offensive, positional battles while the guerrillas aid the conventional army by destroying the enemy's logistical bases. During the second phase, where "our form of fighting will be primarily guerilla warfare," Mao describes extensively how the guerilla warfare should be waged to control the enemy's rear areas, including establishing bases (guerrilla controlled areas) and turning enemy controlled areas (enemy bases) into contested areas.²⁵ In contrast, in a revolutionary war, the three stages are the agitation phase, i.e. inciting the masses; the equilibrium phase, with open violence with guerilla operations and establishment of bases; and lastly, open warfare between insurgents and government forces, particularly with formations of large, conventional units.²⁶

Rather than elevating the "people's war" nature of both, it is more useful to elevate the differences to appreciate the finer points of the two strategies born out of the different conflicts. A revolutionary war attempts to change the status quo and is offense oriented in nature.²⁷ A war of resistance is fights to preserve the status quo by defending an existing order against an external enemy. Critical aspects to the China's resistance war are that the ends were to maintain sovereignty and to resist domination by a superior power; that the ways were using compound warfare, e.g. defensive in territory considered a defensive zone and offensive in a contested zone. The conflict was also waged in a protracted manner to exhaust the stronger state that had to operate with an exterior line with longer lines of communication.

It is important to note the compound nature of this warfare, the use of conventional and unconventional means simultaneously throughout the campaign. Stages differed in relative strengths of the two means, dictating the main and supporting efforts. It is also important to note that Mao believed that in order to completely defeat the enemy and emerge victorious, one had to eventually go on the offensive with conventional forces as the main effort, with unconventional forces harassing the enemy's rear as the supporting effort.²⁸

Mao's Concepts in China's Grand Strategies during the Mao and Deng Eras

Do Mao's ideas still garner respect to prevail as the current grand strategy for China? While many have stated that Mao's ideology was expunged with Deng Xia-ping's coming of power, his ideas remained ingrained with the Chinese elite, particularly within the People's Liberation Army (PLA).²⁹ Mao's ideas in general significantly lost their appeal right after his death, but Deng himself noted Mao's greatness in thoughts that needed to be retained but had to be modified to fit the modern times.³⁰

In the latter part of Mao's reign in the 1960's, his mature grand strategy for China was one of revolution, exerted to maintain and support the revolutionary fervor both domestically and globally.³¹ Freeman notes that a grand strategy can be one of overthrowing the international system and reordering relations among states, though most common grand strategy utilizes the existing international system to pursue its interests.³² Mao's strategy was that of the former, and he actively supported revolutions around the world to upturn the bipolar world that centered on the United States and the Soviet Union.³³ As for the military strategy, the emphasis was on "people's war."³⁴ If one

were to pick from Freeman's categorical choices in diplomatic strategies of assertive, passive defensive, or active defensive, it would be assertive during this period.³⁵

China's relationship with the world changed in the 1970's. It became less assertive, less revolutionary and less enthusiastic on wars of liberation against imperialism around the world.³⁶ China itself was exhausted from the mental, physical, and economic toll from the revolutionary ideology and practices of the Cultural Revolution. The U.S., with good timing, offered a diplomatic opening to Mao to counter the Soviet threat, which he readily accepted.³⁷ When Deng Xia-ping came to power after Mao's death, he attempted to exorcise revolutionary traces and concentrated on modernization as the number one priority.³⁸ The military strategy was centered on the Soviet Union and the potential for a nuclear war. In case of a ground war with the Soviet Union, China expected to fight a "people's war under modern conditions,"³⁹ and the very mention of people's war indicated the lingering of Mao's ideas. Its strategy for the world was a passive defense, with general pragmatism and openness to the outside world.⁴⁰

China in the 1980's, still under Deng's reign, continued a period of passive defense strategy with subtle changes. Diplomatically it continued a cautious opening up to the world. Still, according to Joseph Cheng and Zhang Wankun, the tradition of anti-hegemony, the thought that hegemony was the greatest threat to the stability of the world, carried on with successive Chinese elites while lacking the ideological fervor of Mao.⁴¹ The military strategy, commensurate with diplomatic and economic opening up to the world, was overhauled from a continental defense against the Soviet Union to fight a "local, limited war" with unspecified enemies on China's periphery.⁴²

Mao's Concepts in China's Grand Strategies Post-Deng Era

The end of the Cold War in 1989 brought about more changes to China. In the 1990's there was an increased wariness towards the United States becoming a hegemon and, with a jump in China's economic growth, nationalism rose. Again to borrow Freeman's choices, an active defense approach to grand strategy came to being. The quick victory by the United States military over the Iraqi forces in Operation Desert Storm shocked the Chinese into rethinking their military strategy and doctrine.⁴³ The military strategy was focused to fight "local, limited wars under high-tech conditions" as a result.⁴⁴ The bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade confirmed to China the flexing of hegemonic military muscle even as Bill Clinton emphasized "strategic partnership" between the United States and China.⁴⁵ Wu Xinbo notes that especially in the 1990s, Mao's thoughts once again reached new popular heights "because of his courage to stand firm against Western imperialism."⁴⁶ What is clear is that China's grand strategy was transitioning.

The decade of the 2000's provided the impetus for completing the transition. The United States played up to the imperial fears when it talked and behaved as if it were an empire.⁴⁷ China often became its diplomatic target. With the election of George W. Bush, China was portrayed as a competitor, and the United States built a hedging strategy against it, often referred to as "containment" versus "engagement" of the Clinton years.⁴⁸ The collision of the U.S. Navy's reconnaissance plane with a Chinese fighter in April 2001 seemed yet another event that solidified the Chinese belief in the United States' aggressive intent. The United States' uses of military power in Iraq and Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attack of 2001 along with seemingly unilateral

diplomatic tendencies raised tensions and deep concerns within China. The United States' continued arms sales to Taiwan soured China, which perceived the sales as the United States continuing to meddle in the affairs of China.⁴⁹ Militarily, the United States' experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, in which unconventional tactics by weaker adversaries achieved some successes against the U.S., may have influenced China to reemphasize the value of asymmetric and protracted approaches. China's latest military strategic guidance in the 2008 White Paper deleted the term "limited" and at the same time, China updated the scenario of modern conventional conflict, substituting "high-tech conditions" with "conditions of informatization."⁵⁰ With the combination of the rise in Chinese nationalism, apparent U.S. imperialism, and the moderate success of weaker states to resist a stronger state, Mao's ideas are making a strong comeback.

War of Resistance as a Contemporary Strategy

Given the above context of the current situation, the war of resistance seems to be the best framework to understand China's current grand strategy. It is a strategic defense that utilizes diplomatic and military means, conventional and unconventional, in geographic orientation, and in a protracted manner to achieve its political and economic aims. China, using an overall defensive strategy, does not want to overturn the international order. It is not in their interest to do so because, as discussed earlier, China derives economic benefit from the order that is productive to achieving its national aims. China does, however, want to defend any imposition or breach against what it considers its sovereignty or territorial rights. Diplomatically and militarily it does not want to outright challenge or compete with the United States, but is building capabilities to deter the United States and to defeat, if necessary, any actions against its

sovereignty and territory.⁵¹ While defensive in overall intent and on the global scale, diplomatic and military elements can be offensive at the local level and at the different levels of war: theater strategic, operational, or tactical.

Just as in the original war of resistance, China's area of interest can be geographically divided into two areas, a defensive zone and that of contested zones. The defensive zone is its nearby sphere of influence: roughly the area surrounding the territorial boundary of China and the peripheral countries. The contested zones can be considered everywhere else. The contested zones can be further divided into areas where China is able to establish bases of operations, and areas where it is difficult to do so because they are part of either a U.S. controlled zone or base of operation.

Conventional in the Defensive Zone

For China's defensive zone, the emphasis is on a conventional approach. Diplomatically China has developed a robust "good neighboring policy" with peripheral countries.⁵² This includes developing diplomatic and economic ties through international organizations, and bilateral and multilateral relationships to strengthen its regional interests.⁵³ One such means is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization signed in April 1996 that includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁴ At the same time, China is staking claims on territorial disputes in the South China Sea and declaring the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as not just an economic zone as recognized by the international community, but rather as a national security related boundary.⁵⁵ In addition to security issues, China has taken an active role in the environment, transnational crime, and immigration with regional countries.⁵⁶

Its military doctrine calls this area the “war zone,” and the doctrine of war zone campaign emphasizes a conventional defense capability that is adept at joint operations, “fighting local wars under conditions of informatization” and “access-denial.”⁵⁷ Hence the efforts to build conventional military capabilities like anti-ship missiles, cruise missile, submarines, long-range bombers, advanced fighters, and amphibious forces that can not only fight a Taiwan scenario, but also a regional defense scenario, are on the rise.⁵⁸ In conjunction with diplomatic efforts, there is emphasis on the defense of the periphery away from the continent, particularly in the maritime territories and claims where the conflict with the United States is mostly likely.⁵⁹

Unconventional in the Contested Zone

It is important to understand that China’s grand strategy is a compound approach as in the war of resistance theory.⁶⁰ While the conventional approach is utilized in the defensive zone, unconventional means are applied simultaneously in the contested zone.⁶¹ Diplomatically and militarily, the approach resembles an offense vis-à-vis American leadership in the local scene just as in guerilla offense in the original war of resistance. In the modern manifestation, the contested zones include those areas where the United States plays a leadership role, including North America, Europe, parts of Asia and Middle East and areas where the United States is engaged in activities but does not necessarily dominate, e.g. Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Diplomatically, China engaged the world starting in the 1990s with a push towards a multi-polar system and emphasized its partnerships with various countries and blocs.⁶² China stresses the principle of sovereignty in the international community, trying to coalesce the states to push back on what it considers United States’

interventionist tendencies. Realizing that multi-polarity is not going to happen any time soon, China also cultivates economic and diplomatic relations that could engender doubt as to the United States' leadership in the world politics and economy.⁶³ In the contested zones, China often is ahead of the United States in engagement efforts, in effect promoting the idea that, just like China, economic prosperity does not have to come with relinquishing political control. China is an example of state capitalism to many countries around the globe, including Venezuela, Iran, and Nigeria.⁶⁴ It can be argued that China has in fact been very successful in setting up political bases of operations in the contested zone, even in areas that may be considered traditional U.S.'s bases of operation, e.g. Australia, Japan, and Korea. These staunchest allies undoubtedly now have to balance their economic interests with traditional security interests.⁶⁵ Even Europe, the birthplace of western ideology, has to woo the Chinese for purchase of European debt.⁶⁶ The United States itself is also very much influenced by China's public diplomacy that targets business and trade interests groups.⁶⁷ *People's Daily* picked up the effectiveness of Chinese lobbying efforts, with the U.S. Congress once accusing the China Ocean Shipping Company of espionage, now praising the company for providing jobs for Americans.⁶⁸ Many of these unconventional concepts were incorporated into the PLA's political doctrine in 2003 under the concept of three warfares: psychological, public opinion, and legal.⁶⁹

Direct military unconventional means are also utilized in contested zones. One approach is developing capabilities that can directly impact the U.S. defenses by striking out from Mainland China through global commons. These include cyber warfare, intercontinental ballistic missiles, anti-satellite capabilities, and long-range submarines.

Timothy Thomas notes that PLA officers writing on Internet strategies advocate a “people’s war” and infers that China is already actively “at war” in cyberspace.⁷⁰ This is too literal an interpretation of “war,” but it does portend the importance of cyber warfare as a part of the unconventional capabilities for wartime and peacetime. As for space strategy, while still in the infancy stage, Dean Cheng notes that PLA is thinking about military space operations that can not only provide informational advantages, but the potential ability to attack terrestrial targets from space-based systems.⁷¹

Another unconventional military approach is using military diplomacy such as military sales, technical assistance, and peacekeeping operations. In the last two decades, China has significantly increased its military diplomacy to not only reinforce its defensive zone, but to build both physical and relational bases of operations overseas.⁷² The 2008 White Paper has explicitly included a borrowed term from the United States Army, Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW), to denote peacetime operations of the military that is not conventional in nature.⁷³ China provides one of the largest peacekeeping forces in the world. As of December 2008, it had 2,146 peacekeepers serving in 11 UN missions, in comparison to 296 peacekeepers from the United States.⁷⁴ The authors note this as a positive trend in China’s responsible behavior towards global security issues. On the other hand, they also note:

They will accrue operational knowledge and a better understanding of the political and security dynamics and complexities on the ground... Over time, it is possible China would aim to counterbalance Western influence gradually and take a more active role in shaping the norms and responses regarding UN peacekeeping operations in ways consistent with Chinese foreign policy principles and national interests.⁷⁵

As with United States' deployment of troops, Chinese military operations overseas enhance security of China's diplomatic and economic interests in the deployed region as well as providing familiarization experience and bases for future military operations.

Protracted Approach

Another characteristic of the war of resistance strategy is the time span to execute it, which is "protracted" in Mao's words. It is a strategy of exhaustion, the idea being that in the long run the United States will tire before China. The United States that relies on a conventional approach has more areas to defend and has to expend more resources over longer lines of communication. China can conserve its resources, slowly build its capabilities, and bide its time until the moment it can, if required, conventionally challenge the United States. As noted earlier, China now has deleted the term "limited" in its concept of wars that it has to fight.

How long will the protracted strategy take and exactly what stage of the resistance is China in? This may be taking the framework too far, but it may be useful to consider. It is safe to say that the strategy is currently not at the third stage in execution where China is conventionally ready to go on the offense with the United States. Arguments can be made that China is at the first stage where the execution of the strategy is largely defensive, both conventionally and unconventionally, while the required conventional capabilities are being developed. Some may argue that the second stage of stalemate has already arrived with China's ability to deny any actions by the United States to come to the aid of Taiwan should a conflict occur between China and Taiwan. To add to the strength of the second stage view, an argument can be made that China is on the offensive unconventionally with its diplomacy and the military.

If this view is chosen, the grand strategy took two decades to complete the first stage, the strategy being born when China initially came to the world's stage just after the end of the Cold War. As a rough extrapolation, perhaps another two decades is reasonable if China wanted to complete the second stage.⁷⁶ However, China will want to remain in the second stage as long as reasonably possible because the cost to build conventional capabilities to go on the offensive is too extraordinary and counterproductive to achieving its aims of economic growth.

Implications for the United States

David Lai has an interesting metaphor for explaining the Chinese way of strategy that supports and sums up the war of resistance concept. He claims that the Chinese game of *go* is better at explaining China's strategy than chess, which is tailored more to the western way of strategy.⁷⁷ First, there is the difference of the geometry, or the territorial aspects, to the game of *go* versus the force orientation objective in the game of chess. As explained earlier, the war of resistance is very much about geography and territory, e.g. the defensive zone, or "sphere of influence" as Lai calls it. Then there are the ordinary and extraordinary moves akin to conventional and unconventional approaches. The players can engage in multiple theaters whereas chess is largely one contiguous front that is conventional. Chess relies on decisive maneuvers whereas *go* is one of patience and endurance. *Go* rarely goes to completion where one side dominates and entire forces are annihilated or the King is "checkmated" as in chess. It is a protracted game that ends when the parties have committed all their resources and no more moves can be made.

What are then the implications for the U.S. in dealing with a China that is executing a grand strategy of war of resistance? First, the United States should recognize that it is a defensive strategy, not a design to dethrone the United States from the international order. There is opportunity and incentive to cooperate on maintaining a strong international order for mutual benefit. On the other hand the United States should not mistake the overall defensiveness of China's strategy as unwillingness to confront the United States. China is building up a substantial conventional force that can be used to deny the United States' access to the regions as well significant unconventional diplomacy and military capabilities that can be used in an offense.

Second, Mao's concept of compound warfare is still well and alive in China's grand strategy. "People's war" should not be discounted as an anachronism that cannot stand up to modern warfare that relies on mobility, firepower, and speed. It should not be confused with human wave or pure guerilla tactics, but rather be understood as a sophisticated compound warfare of conventional and unconventional capabilities. Mao was very well versed in Clausewitz, Jomini, and Sun Tzu, and those ideas are incorporated in his ideas, especially in the war of resistance theory. U.S. policymakers and strategists would do well not to dismiss Mao's ideas as an eastern way of thinking that is no match for the western political thought and military philosophy.

Third, geography matters to China, and this should be well understood by the United States. While China may be strategically on the defensive, militarily it is pushing out the boundary of its defensive zone because advances in military technologies continue to expand the operational areas of military units. This is alarming to maritime Asia where China's military reach may soon extend to the second chain islands.⁷⁸

Additionally the forward deployed forces of the United States are becoming vulnerable to the first-strike capabilities of China. As a solution, it is tempting to redeploy forces and station them back on the continental United States and rely on rapid deployments during crisis situations. It may be reasonable in an operational context, but in the strategic context, this amounts to letting China turn the United States' controlled zone into a contest zone, or worse turning it into a Chinese defensive zone at a very little cost to China. Instead the United States should maintain robust forward bases of operations and cause China to expend its resources to deal with them. The United States should not cede areas such Japan, Okinawa, and Korea. Once out, it will be more difficult for the United States to get back in. The bases of operations may not be available when the United States needs them. The United States may inadvertently have ceded Philippines and Thailand, and China may already consider them as part of a contested zone.

Fourth, the United States should not cede leadership in the protection of global commons. While it may be appealing for economic reasons to urge China to share the costs, the United States may find it counterproductive when China indeed builds capabilities that can conduct security operations that only the United States has been able to do thus far. A robust, Chinese blue-water navy that is capable of projecting several aircraft carrier groups might be costly for both countries as unintended arms competition and the potential for misreading of each other's intentions on high seas rise.

Fifth, contesting for areas for the sake of contesting may not be worth the costs for the United States. For example, places in Africa are truly contested in that they are not under direct sphere of influence of either the United States or China. Unless the United States can define vital national interests in these areas, the policy choice should

be to allow China to engage. China brings a level of assistance, development, military assistance, and peacekeeping operations into this part of the world for which the United States simply lacks the resources. While some may argue for competition for resources and moral leadership on the African continent, the other side of the argument is that resource extraction by China adds to overall available global resources and Chinese assistance can improve the prospects of developing countries. What is important is for the United States to understand the China's strategy in the contested areas and maintains awareness on the latter's activities.

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that China is executing a strategy for the long run. The United States cannot be short sighted in its national interests and objectives. This paper has established that, in the current environment, China's economic goal would discourage a strategic offensive to reorder the international system, but a key question remains whether China will in the end want to reach for the third stage based on its interests in the future environment.

Conclusion

Mao's war of resistance theory is a useful framework for understanding China's grand strategy. While to describe it as "active defense" or "people's war" strategy would not be wrong, neither has the full explanatory power that the war of resistance offers. The war of resistance strategy is about China's pursuit of stability, modernity, and sovereignty as ends, using ways of geographical approach in a compound manner, using conventional and unconventional means simultaneously, and over a protracted period. Executing the strategy in a global environment that is United States led, it is ultimately a defensive strategy and not an assertive strategy to overturn the world order.

From each of their perspectives, both the United States and China may see itself as executing an “active defensive” strategy that aims to maintain the status quo as they see fit, and yet it is easy to mistake the other’s strategy as being assertive.

Policymakers should understand the “war of resistance” framework as China’s grand strategy so that they may develop a unified strategy that encourages China to benefit from the order and play a responsible role. Dismissing Mao’s concepts because revolutionary war or people’s war sounds anachronistic is to misunderstand one’s potential adversary that may lead to either overestimating or underestimating his intent and capability.

Lastly, the war of resistance has implications not only at the grand strategic level, but also at the theater strategic, operational, and tactical levels as well. While this paper dealt only with grand strategy, the further research into implications of the concept at the operations and tactical levels would be useful.

Endnotes

¹ This is written based on Colin Gray’s discussion on grand strategy without actually defining it. It also matches closely with the National Security Strategy as defined by CJCS. Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 150, 162-163.

² While not a historical analysis, Gaddis articulates the unfolding George W. Bush administration’s grand strategy in the aftermath of the attack of September 11th. John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), Chapter 4.

³ A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred a. Knopf, 1969, second edition). Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). A. F. K. Organski and Jack Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

⁴ Lai, for examples, writes of new military hawks. David Lai, *The Coming of Chinese Hawks*, Op-Ed, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, October 2010,

<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1028.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2011).

⁵ Wu Xinbo, "Four Contradictions in Constraining China's Foreign Policy Behavior" in *Chinese Foreign Policy*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 58-59.

⁶ James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2001, 5th ed.), 419-422

⁷ Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 143.

⁸ Hao and Huan contend that all those elements, historical legacy, security concerns, domestic need for economic development, and the international environment, are factors in China's foreign relations. While true and perhaps these factors more significant role than for other nations, they do not well explain what China might hold as its overall strategy similar to the U.S. National Security Strategy. Yufan Hao and Guocang Huan, eds., "Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition", *The Chinese View of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), xv.

⁹ Chinese Government's Official Web Portal, *China's National Defense in 2008*, http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2009-01/20/content_1210227_4.htm (accessed February 22, 2011).

¹⁰ Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 73; Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967), 105.

¹¹ There are many variations along this line. Yufan Hao and Guocang Huan, "Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition," xi.

¹² David M. Finklestein, "China's National Military Strategy" in *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age*, eds. James C. Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 103.

¹³ Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 24.

¹⁴ Ibid, 27.

¹⁵ Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, 148-149.

¹⁶ Ibid, 152; Andrew Scobell, *Chinese Army Building in the Era of Jiang Zemin* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, August 2008), 20.

¹⁷ Scobell, *Chinese Army Building*, 3, 20.

¹⁸ David Lai, "Introduction" in *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 19.

¹⁹ Zi Zhongyun, "The Clash of Ideas: Ideology and Sino-U.S. Relations in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Pragmatism and Strategic Behavior*, ed. Zhao, 241.

²⁰ Zi, "The Clash of Ideas," 220.

²¹ Writing in 1936 in comparison to later writing in 1938 Mao reverts back to categorizing war of resistance as a specific form of a revolutionary war as if to defend against an accusation that fighting the Japanese fell outside of the realm of a revolution. Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967), 89 and 271.

²² Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, 270; and chapter on "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War," 77-146.

²³ Ibid, 77-146 and 153-183.

²⁴ Ibid, 153.

²⁵ Ibid, 212-219.

²⁶ Mao's does not quite put in these terms, but Krepvinevich develop these stages from various writings of Giap and Mao. Andrew Krepvinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 7-8.

²⁷ "The proposition that a revolution or a revolutionary war is an offensive is of course correct." Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, 102.

²⁸ Mao, *Selected Military Writings*, page no.

²⁹ Dennis Blasko, "New PLA Structure in Information Age" in *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age*, eds. James C. Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 258-288.

³⁰ Communist Party of China, *1980: Deng Xiaoping comments on Mao Zedong Thought*, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229773.htm> (Accessed February 26, 2011).

³¹ Cheng and Zhang attribute this characteristic from 1960-1972. Joseph Y.S. Cheng and Zhang Wankun, "Patterns and Dynamics of Chinese International Strategic Behavior" in *Chinese Foreign Policy*, ed. Zhao, 179.

³² Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 72.

³³ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 277-278.

³⁴ Paul H.B. Goodwin, "The PLA Face the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on Technology, Doctrine, Strategy, and Operations" in *China's Military Faces the Future*, eds. James R. Lilley and David Shambaugh (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, Inc, 1999), 41-42.

³⁵ These terms are similar if not the same to Mao's terminology of revolutionary, passive defense, and active defense (Mao, 102,103-106), revolutionary being equated to offensive (see

previous endnote). Similarity is understandable given Freeman's preeminent expertise on China. Freeman, *Arts of Power*, 72-73.

³⁶ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001), 216.

³⁷ Cheng and Zhang attribute this as a period pseudo-alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union from 1972 to 1982. Cheng and Zhang, "Patterns and Dynamics", 179.

³⁸ Lau Siu-kai, "Pragmatic Calculations of National Interest" in *Chinese Foreign Policy*, ed. Zhao, 98.

³⁹ Paul H.B. Goodwin, "The PLA Face the Twenty-First Century," 43, 46-48.

⁴⁰ 1982 to 1989. Cheng and Zhang, "Patterns and Dynamics," 179. Also see Jian, *Mao's China and Cold War*, 277-278.

⁴¹ Cheng and Zhang, "Patterns and Dynamics," 183.

⁴² Paul H.B. Goodwin, "The PLA Face the Twenty-First Century," 43, 48-49

⁴³ Ibid, 54-55.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 43.

⁴⁵ Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, 153.

⁴⁶ Wu Xinbo, "Four Contradictions Constraining China's Policy Behavior," in *Chinese Foreign Policy*, 69.

⁴⁷ There are numerous books on the new American empire published in early 2000's. An example is Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of American Empire* (N.Y., NY: Penguin Press 2004).

⁴⁸ Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, 157.

⁴⁹ Goodwin discusses the U.S. Navy EP-3 collision and the military sales to Taiwan. Paul H.B. Goodwin, "The People's Liberation Army and the Changing Global Security Landscape" in *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 56-57.

⁵⁰ "Chinese Government's Official Web Portal, *China's National Defense in 2008*. http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2009-01/20/content_1210227_4.htm (accessed February 22, 2011).

⁵¹ Dean Cheng, "Chinese Views on Deterrence," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 60 (1st Quarter 2011): 92-94.

⁵² Chinese Government's Official Web Portal, *China's National Defense in 2008*, Chapter I. Situation.

⁵³ Suisheng Zhao, "The Making of Chinese Periphery Policy" in *Chinese Foreign Policy*, 256-259.

⁵⁴ Zhao, "The Making of Chinese Periphery Policy," 263.

⁵⁵ Paul H.B. Goodwin, "The PLA Face the Twenty-First Century," 48-50.

⁵⁶ Zhao, "The Making of Chinese Periphery Policy," 257.

⁵⁷ Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Campaign Doctrine and Strategy" in *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age*, 146; Paul H.B. Goodwin, 46; Michael Flaherty, "Red Wings Ascendant: The Chinese Air Force Contribution to Antiaccess," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 60 (1st Quarter 2011): 95.

⁵⁸ Mark Cozad, "China's Regional Power Projection: Prospects for Future Mission in the South and East China Seas, *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 289-290.

⁵⁹ Paul H.B. Goodwin, "The PLA Faces the Twenty-first Century," *China's Military Faces the Future*, 48-50.

⁶⁰ Latest fad is to call it hybrid warfare, which is supposed to denote all forms of warfare used simultaneously. This paper will use compound warfare. Thomas M. Huber, ed. *Compound Warfare. That Fatal Knot*, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, 2002).

⁶¹ Another latest fad is asymmetric warfare to denote what is termed as unconventional this paper. It is meant to denote it as a weaker organization's way of war against a stronger entity. Unrestricted is another term since the writing of two Chinese military writers. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare: Assumptions on War and Tactics in the Age of Globalization* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999).

⁶² Cheng and Zheng, "Patterns and Dynamics," 179-180.

⁶³ Halper, *Beijing Consensus*.

⁶⁴ Ibid, Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ John Frewen, *Harmonious Ocean: Chinese Aircraft Carriers and Australia's U.S. Alliance*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 10, 2010).

⁶⁶ Anthony Fiaola, "Chinese Clout Felt in Europe", *Washington Post*, January 10, 2010.

⁶⁷ Steve Mufenson and Peter Whoriskey, "China Agrees to Buy Hummer," *Washington Post*, October 10, 2009; John Pompret, "China's Lobbying Efforts Yield New Influence, Openness on Capitol Hill", *Washington Post*, January 9, 2010.

⁶⁸ “Congress Feels Chinese Influence”, *People’s Daily*, January 11, 2010, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6864713.html> (accessed February 5, 2011).

⁶⁹ Dean Cheng, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 26, 2011, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Testimony/2011/01/Chinas-Active-Defense-Strategy-and-Its-Regional-Impact> (accessed February 15, 2011).

⁷⁰ Timothy L. Thomas, “Google Confronts”, *Parameter* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 109.

⁷¹ Dean Cheng, “Prospects for China’s Military Space Efforts,” in *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 231.

⁷² Heidi Holz and Kenneth Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics: The People’s Liberation Army Experience with Military Relations” in *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan*, 429.

⁷³ Chinese Government’s Official Web Portal, *China’s National Defense in 2008*, Chapter II. National Defense Policy.

⁷⁴ Bates Gill and Chin-hao Huang, “China’s Expanding Presence in UN Peacekeeping Operations and Implications for the United States” in *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan*, 104

⁷⁵ Gill and Huang, “China’s Expanding Presence,” 115,117.

⁷⁶ There is no great basis for comparison, but in cases of the Korean War and the Vietnam War where war of resistance strategies were utilized, first and second stages were of equal period, 2-3 years in the case of Korea and 5-7 years for Vietnam before the full-scale conventional offensive.

⁷⁷ David Lai, *Learning from the Stones: A Go Approach to Mastering China’s Strategic Concept*, Shi (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, May 2004).

⁷⁸ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2010*, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf (accessed February 1, 2011), 22-23.